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JULY, 1948



Newsdealer

The Business Paper of Independent Distribution

ANNUAL COMICS ISSUE

Magazine Guide
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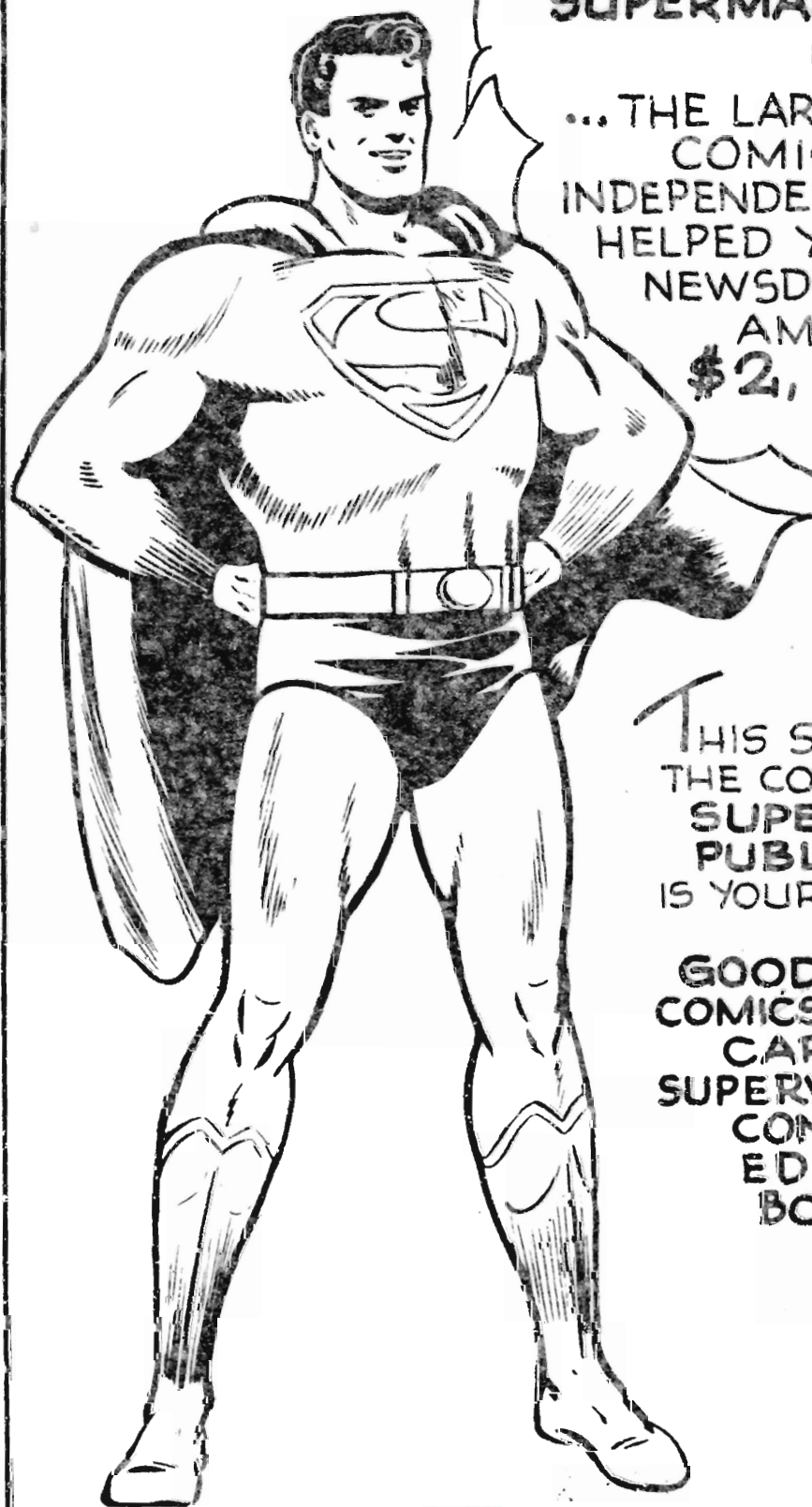
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NEWSDEALER—The Business Paper for Publication Retailers: Publication offices, 271 Madison Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. MURRAY Hill 5-4789. W. H. Cobb, President and Publisher; Roger M. Damio, Editor; Adam Barth, Art Consultant. Advertising Director: W. H. Cobb.

JULY, 1948. Volume III, No. 5. Subscription Rates: \$3.00 per year; Canada \$4.00, Foreign \$5.00. Single copies twenty-five cents. Copyright 1948 by NEWSDEALER MAGAZINE INC.

COVER: When we described this month's cover idea to photographer George Jervas, he replied, "Why, that's exactly what happens at our house." Out came camera, tripod, and lights. George and George Jr. went into their normal living room routine. Mrs. Jervas snapped the shutter, recording for future historians a scene that is commonplace in millions of American homes today.

CONTENTS

COMICS — HEADACHE OR PROFIT-MAKER?	3
ARE COMICS GOOD OR BAD FOR KIDS?	4
BIG VOLUME MEANS BIG PROFITS	6
A FORCE FOR GOOD IN THE COMMUNITY	9
COMICS PAY OFF	10
SALES-WINNING COMICS DISPLAYS	13
WHAM! ZING! ZOWIE!	16
WHO BUYS AND READS COMICS?	18
I LIKE GOOD COMICS	21
THIS MONTH'S MAGAZINE DIRECTORY	22

The series of articles on the origin and growth of Independent Distribution and the Monthly Sales Primer have been omitted this month to bring our readers important information about comics. These features will be resumed next month.

COMICS --

Headache or Profit-Maker?

In the early 1930's, an obscure but enterprising salesman for a large printing concern put together a series of comic strips in book form. He set up his brain child so that it could be printed on newspaper presses and newspaper stock . . . which meant speed and economy. Although he didn't set the world on fire at that time, he is credited by many old-timers in the comics business with starting the whole idea.

And he really started something!

Comics, as we know them today, have mushroomed into a gigantic industry. Americans, youngsters and oldsters alike, buy approximately 50,000,000 copies each month! Comics are big business to many publishers, distributors and retailers as well as artists, writers and printers.

Like all big business, comics are subject to certain abuses. There isn't a retailer, wholesaler or publisher for that matter, who isn't agreed that there are too many comics. During the month of May, 1948, for instance, some 280 different comic titles were on sale . . . a number that threatened headaches for the retailers who had to display them, the wholesalers who were required to distribute them and the publishers, whose own titles had to compete with them for precious display space and sales.

For many years, it was possible for any aspiring comics publisher to get out an issue on little or no capital. Because comics were so successful some printers even extended full credit. During the war particularly, when almost anything would sell on the newsstands, many hastily-put-together titles appeared. Even after the war there seemed to be no let-up.

As conditions on the comics racks of the nation worsened, the 13 Independent publishers and national distributors, together with representatives of Independent wholesaler associations, sat down and planned to do something about it. The Independent publishers agreed to eliminate many slow-moving titles, to trim their print orders and to distribute few and only best-selling new titles.

Real action followed!

Here are two examples of the genuine cooperation extended by Independent publishers in eliminating titles. Fawcett reports that its line of comics was cut from 116 titles to a present day low of 17 breadwinners! EC comics trimmed its line from 13 titles to 7. But this did not cure the too-many-titles evil. For many comics publishers who were refused distribution by the Independents nevertheless succeeded in having their books reach the newsstands through other sources.

Today, a new factor is entering the picture and it appears that some relief may be in sight.

High production costs . . . paper, printing, artists, editors . . . are compelling publishers to cut down returns. The "break even" point has moved up considerably. An unsold comic is just about twice the loss to

(Continued on page 26)

Are Comics Good or Bad for Kids?

Abridged from the Town Meeting of the Air
Broadcast of March 2, "What's Wrong With Comics?"

Moderator Denny:

Good evening, neighbors. Probably more Americans read the comic page than any other feature of their newspaper and hundreds of different comic magazines may be purchased at any newsstand in the country. Is it any wonder, then, that your Town Meeting has decided to explore this world of fantasy that has captured the interest of Americans of all ages?

Let's take a trip to the land of the comics and find out what really makes it tick. Why do comic pages draw more readers than front pages? Is this good or is it bad? Is there anything wrong with the comics?

Our guests, John Mason Brown and Marya Mannes, both authors and lecturers, feel that there most emphatically is something wrong and they will tell you why in no uncertain terms in just a moment.

On the other hand, Mr. George Hecht, publisher of *Parents' Magazine* and other publications, and Al Capp, creator of "Li'l Abner" come staunchly to the defense of this \$60,000,000 industry.

Parents and children, psychiatrists and psychologists, churchmen and laymen, GIs and John Does hold strong opinions on this question. So let's hear first from one of the nimblest minds in the world of literature, Mr. John Mason Brown, author and critic and associate editor of the *Saturday Review of Literature* and Town Hall lecturer, Mr. Brown. (Applause.)

Mr. Brown:

The comics, alas, like death and taxes, are very much with us and to my way of thinking they are equally unfunny. Why they are called comics when people who read them, young and old, always look like so many undertakers during the reading, eludes me. But we'll let that pass, just as most of us as parents have had to let comics pass into our homes, against our will, against our wishes, against our better judgment.

I love comedians, the highest, the lowest, and the toughest, and I love cartoons, too, but my allergy to comics is

complete, utter, absolute. I know there are bad comics and I am told there are good comics. I have read them—a few of both, only a few, fortunately—under protest, but I regret them both. I deplore them and, to continue the understatement, I abhor them.

Let me quickly admit that I am low enough and sometimes defeated enough as a parent to make use of comics. I mean in desperate moments when, of a rainy Sunday morning or afternoon, I want peace in the home. Or when I'm traveling with my two sons on a train and I need to subdue them. Then—yes, I'll confess it—I do resort to comics, without shame, without conscience.

On such occasions, I don't so much distribute comics as I administer them to my sons (*laughter and applause*), much as a barkeep would pour out Mickey Finns or a doctor distribute hypodermics. As knock-out drops for unruly children, as sedatives, as Maxim silencers comics do have their undeniable uses. (*Laughter.*) This much I'll concede gratefully, Mr. Hecht.

I also grant that so long as other people's children read comics, we have scant hope, and perhaps less right, to keep ours from doing so. It would be unfair for us to deny to our children what is now a group experience and when they have grown up will have become a group memory for their generation.

If I hate the comics, I promise you I have my reasons for doing so. I know that as part of every healthy diet, everyone needs a certain amount of trash. Each generation has always found its own. The comic books, however, as they are nowadays perpetually on tap, seem to me not only to be trash but the lowest, most despicable, and most harmful and unethical form of trash. (*Laughter and applause.*)

What riles me when I see my children absorbed by the comics is my awareness of what they are not reading and could be reading: in other words, of the more genuine and deeper pleasures they could and should be having.

To compare Bugs Bunny or Donald Duck with the *Jungle Book* or even the *Travels of Babar*, and to set Wanda the

Wonder Woman against *Alice of Wonderland*, or Batman and Robin, Dick Tracy, and Gene Autry against *Treasure Island*, or Li'l Abner, if Mr. Capp will forgive me, against Huck Finn or Tom Sawyer, or Superman and Captain Marvel against Jules Verne or *Gulliver's Travels* is to realize that between the modern cave drawing—which a comic book really is—and a real book, a good book, there is, to put it mildly, a difference, a tragic difference which is hard on the young and may be harder on the future.

Anatole France once described even the best books as being the opium of the Occident. Well, most comics, as I see them are the marijuana of the nursery! (*Laughter.*) They are the bane of the bassinet! (*Laughter.*) They are the horror of the home, the curse of the kids, and a threat to the future!

The comics offer final and melancholy proof that even among the young the mind is the most unused muscle in the United States. (*Laughter and applause.*)

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, John Mason Brown. Well, I'd say John Mason Brown is riled. (*Laughter.*) Now, Mr. Hecht, as the successful publisher of *Parents' Magazine* and a number of comic magazines—in spite of Mr. Brown—including *True Comics*, *Jack Armstrong*, and other magazines for young people, what have you to say about his criticism?

Ever since he graduated from Cornell in 1917, George Hecht has made a success with publishing magazines which give useful information to parents and children. We are very happy to welcome him on America's Town Meeting of the Air. Mr. Hecht. (*Applause.*)

Mr. Hecht:

Nearly everybody, Mr. Brown notwithstanding, reads and enjoys the comics. Judge Albert Cary, when he was chairman of the Board of Directors of the United States Steel Corporation, once said that at a Board meeting he found that every single member of the Board of the United States Steel read the comics.



Comics experts at Town Hall—Left to right: John Mason Brown, Marya Mannes, George V. Denny, Jr., Al Capp and George J. Hecht.

Comics provide good entertainment and exciting adventure. We have far too little fun in this troubled world. In addition to comics that appear in the newspapers, there are, believe it or not, 246 different comic magazines.

It is estimated that 40 million copies of comic magazines are sold each month on the newsstands. Surveys made by impartial research firms reveal that 91 out of every 100 boys and girls 6 to 17 years of age read the comic magazines and only 9 out of a 100 do not read them at all.

Perhaps the most indisputable proof of appeal of the comic magazines is that in the Army camps during the war, comic magazines outsold even the best-selling magazines like *Life*, *Saturday Evening Post*, and *The Reader's Digest*, and as a matter of fact, outsold them ten to one.

The comics are really a new medium of communication, just as radio and television are now mediums of communication. I don't think that most people realize this.

Comics are a series of pictures with a minimum of text that can be read with ease and speed. Many comic magazines consist of exciting adventure stories. All children crave adventure and should have some of it, even if it is only vicarious.

The United States Armed Services used the comics as a means of teaching soldiers and sailors how to operate var-

ious weapons and how to conduct themselves in battle. They found that soldiers and sailors learned more rapidly by means of the comics.

In *True Comics*, which is one of the magazines that our company publishes, we teach children history and science and current events via the comics.

Through special comic folders, industrial workers are taught lessons in safety and health via the comics.

On the other hand, I admit there are a small percentage of comic magazines that I consider harmful to young readers. There are a number of comic magazines on the stands that are extremely sexy and unduly deal with the activities of criminals, which magazines I do admit are harmful to the young.

Some educational authorities declare that all comic magazines are bad. On the other hand, there are certain eminent child psychologists who state that all comic magazines are good for children inasmuch as they teach them about life.

I'm not in either camp. I believe that there are good comic magazines and bad comics just as there are good books and bad books, good motion pictures and bad motion pictures.

I believe that the comic magazine publishers should initiate a system of self-censorship, just as the motion-picture producers have for years had as an organization to censor those pictures that would otherwise bring the movie industry into disrepute.

I have been active in forming an association of the comic magazine publishers, and we are now in the process of drafting a code which we fervently hope all publishers will live up to.

I believe, Mr. Brown, that parents and teachers should not condemn all comics indiscriminately, but should encourage children to select the better comics and to avoid the inferior ones. The better comics should be commended and publicized just as the better motion pictures are commended and publicized by women's clubs, educational and church groups, and better film councils.

But no matter how you feel about the comics, there seems only one inescapable conclusion: the comics are here to stay! There is nothing wrong with the comics that good publishing cannot and will not correct. (Applause.)

Moderator Denny:

Thank you, Mr. Hecht. Our next speaker, Miss Marya Mannes, comes from a family of distinguished artists. Her father is David Mannes and her uncle is Walter Damrosch. She's done sculpturing, written documentary movies, poetry, articles, and stories which have been published widely. More recently, her first novel, *Message From a Stranger* was published this spring by the Viking Press. Miss Mannes has very positive opinions to tonight's question, so we're happy to hear them on America.

(Continued on page 21)

Big Volume-Big Profits

ONE of New York's large and successful department stores consistently advertises its effective slogan—"A business in millions, a profit in pennies" . . . the point being that large volume and rapid turnover make it possible to offer merchandise for sale at extraordinarily low prices. Of course, the store doesn't lose any money. Rather, its gross profit is considerably larger. For the smaller unit profit, when multiplied by the larger volume of sales and faster turnover, spells bigger profit totals!

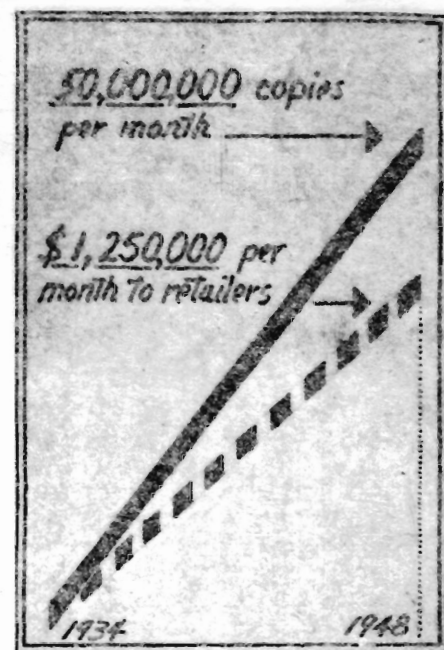
In the field of comic magazines, a similar situation exists . . . only more so. For here the dime buys so much that the sales volume is almost unbelievable and the profit (to the retailer) is in the millions each month!

At the present time, it is estimated that the total monthly sales of comics is about 50,000,000 copies. Of that number the subscription sales are negligible, which means that the retailer does virtually all the selling and reaps virtually

all the profit. At $2\frac{1}{2}\text{¢}$ per copy profit, total profits to retailers each month is approximately \$1,250,000.00! Divide this by the 90,000 dealers who sell comics and you get an average monthly profit per dealer of a few pennies less than \$14. This figure, of course, does not include profits from other items that comics customers purchase. Many of these "extra" sales can be attributed to the "pull" of extra traffic by the comics.

Fourteen dollars a month for some retailers is hardly worth getting excited about. For others, however, it will pay the gas and electric bill and maybe more. But the \$14 figure, remember, is only an average. Many dealers make much more on comics and many make much less. In this issue are references to retailers who pay their rent with profits from comics sales!

Obviously, the profit depends upon the dealer . . . and every dealer can, with but a little effort, reap big profits from the large volume of sales that com-



ics ring up when handled properly. To increase your profits from comics read thoroughly every page of this Annual Comics Issue of NEWSDEALER.

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A Force For Good In The Community

THE main contention of the principal critic of the comics, a so-called psychiatrist, is that, according to his findings, juvenile delinquents have been reading comic magazines. He, therefore, concludes that the youngsters became delinquent BECAUSE they read comic magazines. I think this is preposterous.

The influences on children which bring them to the commission of bad deeds are many and complex.

Here's how these "reformers" come by their conclusions. The psychiatrist talks to a boy who has committed a crime. "Do you read comics?" he asks. "Yes," says the boy, "I read comics." "Ah, ha," says the reformer, "now we have it." The boy committed the crime because he read comics.

But suppose we question the same boy and ask him if he eats cereal for breakfast each morning. The boy answers "yes." We could just as reasonably conclude that he committed the crime because he ate cereal.

Of course, the average youngster eats cereal. The average youngster goes to the movies, listens to the radio, goes to church and Sunday School, reads comic magazines, plays baseball. And the average American child is not a delinquent. Delinquent children number only a fraction of one percent. What's all the shouting for anyway? Juvenile delinquency is sharply on the decline. In New York City the number of children arrested for crime has been cut almost in half, in the past 15 years, that is, since comic maga-

zines became popular. It is the good influence of comic magazines that has brought this about!

If we are to take the easy way out and blame comic magazines for juvenile delinquency, we are just avoiding our responsibility. The stubborn causes of juvenile delinquency are to be found in unhappy home life, in poverty-ridden slums, lack of sufficient playgrounds and other deep-rooted causes. Crime existed long before there were any comics and the problem will continue unless we put aside phoney reasoning and get down to a sensible approach.

I cannot for the life of me understand where, except in the minds of a few radical thinking psychiatrists, the idea originated that children must not read about crime. Our whole Western civilization is based upon the idea that we learn to avoid what is wrong in life by being aware of what is good and what is bad. The Bible is testimonial to that.

Shall we stop people from reading Chapter 4 of the Book of Genesis so that no child shall ever know Cain slew Abel? Or because some psychiatrist is going to tell us that if our children read the Bible, they will follow Cain's example and kill their little brothers? Nonsense! The fact is that the great strength of this Bible story and countless others like it is that they show clearly what an upright man must NOT do.

All the great moral books of our civilization teach such lessons by example. They teach children what we mean when we say: "Thou shalt not trespass." They teach children that they must control

themselves morally. And like our modern comic magazines, they point up not only the reward of virtue but the penalty of sin. One of the most popular children's books in America is Lamb's "Tales from Shakespeare." But Shakespeare's plays are crammed with crime and retribution. There is violence aplenty in the stories of King Arthur, in the books of Robert Louis Stevenson and Mark Twain. Grimm's Fairy Tales and Anderson's Fairy Tales are full of horrendous deeds.

Children should not be shielded from reading about evil, or the knowledge that there is such a thing as crime. To the contrary, they must know about it — taught to avoid crime as they are taught to avoid the burning of fire.

No wonder parents approve of comics. They are so absorbing, they keep the children quiet and out of mischief. They stimulate the desire to read and they make learning to read easier. They educate. They teach fair play and good sportsmanship. They teach respect for our courts and authorities and love of good and hatred of evil. Comics are good for children.

Comics are a good, sound force in American life. There are more than 280 different comic magazines now being published and this huge industry is becoming as much a part of the American way of life as the movies, the radio, football and baseball.

I have faith in America's youngsters. I am certain comic magazines are good because we sell so many of them. 60 million comics can't be wrong!

Abridged from the radio address of comics publisher Lev Gleason.

Comics Pay Off!

By DAN FEESE

Retailer, South Plainfield, N. J.

I SELL magazines. I don't just handle them or accept them. I go all out to exchange them for a dime, quarter or half dollar. That's what I'm in business for . . . to make the biggest possible profit . . . and still be a good fellow.

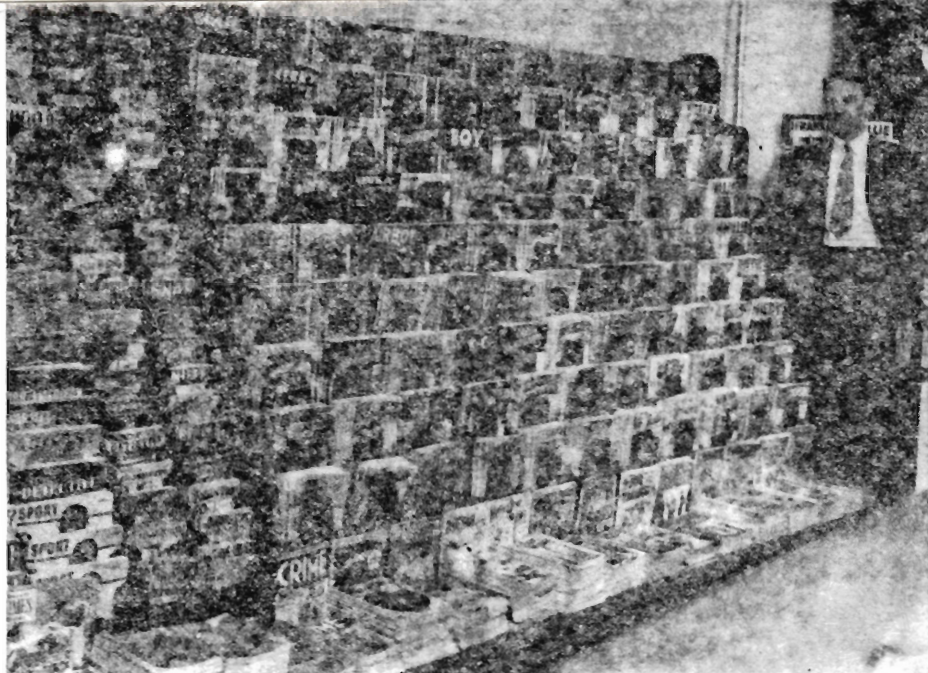
I sell comics, too . . . lots of them. As a matter of fact, in one of my stores (I have three in this area), comics almost pay my rent. In my South Plainfield News Company store my profits from comics amount to about \$45 per month. This takes care of my gas and electric bill, which are not peanuts!

Comics are really paying off for me now, but about a year ago I was ready to call it quits. There were too many comics. I had no room to display them. They took too much time to check. Over at Union County Newsdealers Supply Company they must have sensed my growing annoyance because they sent a man to discuss my comics situation. This fellow had a lot of ideas mostly about methods and fixtures for displaying comics. I decided to take a chance in one of my stores. Out went the old shelves I was using, and in went a new rack which displayed only the top portion of the cover.

In six months, my comics sales were up 110%! I asked my Independent routeman to send me his idea man again and we did over my other two stores.

I'm delighted with the way comics sell in my stores. They represent about 30% of the total volume of my magazine business.

Kids and adults are most enthusiastic about my new racks. They can find the titles they want easily and quickly and they don't muss up the display. Lots of new comics customers are regulars now and they buy other merchandise I sell . . . and I expect they will for years to come. Yes, sir. Comics pay off for me!



Dan Feese partially hides auxiliary comics rack as he stands alongside main comics rack especially designed to prevent covers from lettuce-leaving. 150 titles are prominently displayed on both racks.

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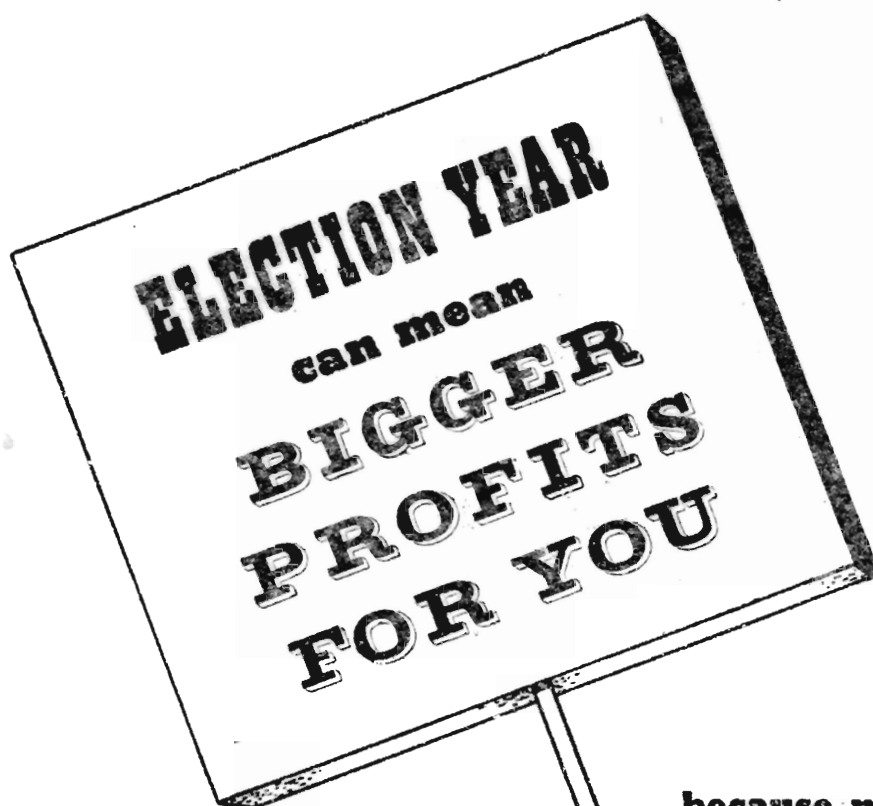


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